

City Pier A
Battery Pl. at Hudson River
New York City
New York County
New York

HAER No. NY-84

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

NY-84

CITY PIER A

Date: Original; 1886
Alterations; 1900, 1904, 1918

Location: End of Battery Place at Hudson River, New York City,
New York Co. N.Y.

Constructed by: Pier and Foundations; G.S. Greene
Structure; C.O. Brown.

Owner: New York Department of Ports and Terminals.

Significance: City Pier 4 is the oldest functioning pier in New York City. The pier and foundations represent a good example of the use of concrete in maritime projects in the late 19th century. The clock tower on Pier A is the first permanent memorial to servicemen who died during World War I.

Transmitted by: Dan Clement, 1983, with historical data drawn from the National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form.

In July, 1884, the New York City Board of Docks voted to erect a pier and building to house the Dept. of Docks and the New York City Police Dept. harbor force. The site chosen was on the southern end of Manhattan Island at the northern edge of Battery Park. This location allowed easy access to both the eastern and western shores of Manhattan as well as regulation of all traffic passing between the harbor and the water front.

The Engineer-in Chief of the City Dept. of Docks, G.S. Greene, was put in charge of the project. He and his crew constructed a pier 45 feet wide that extended 285 feet into the Hudson River. The foundation for the pier was made by first sinking a timber crib or box to bedrock (10 feet below mean low water level). Next, concrete in bags was laid by divers to the top of the crib. Concrete was then placed over the bags and leveled off to allow concrete blocks and granite subpiers to be placed above. Atop the subpiers a structure of girders and concrete arches was built to form the deck of the pier. Asphalt pavement was laid on this to finish the job.

A two-story rectangular building 43 feet wide and 272 feet 2 inches long was constructed on the pier by C.O. Brown. The building was essentially constructed in two sections: 1) a "fire proof" east end that extended 38 feet onto the pier and 2) a wooden structure that included a 70 foot hightower (used by the police as a lookout) on the southwest corner. The first floor of the west (outshore) end was an undivided space with the exception of a boiler room and stairs (to the tower) located along the south wall at the west end. The second floor contains two rows of offices flanking a central corridor that terminates in a meeting room along the west wall.

The eastern (inshore) end contained a room on the second floor (36' 6"x41') used for storage of documents and maps. This end of the structure was designed to be fire proof. The inshore end is separated by a 20 inch brick wall with a 3 inch airspace. Any openings in the wall had fire proof doors and all other openings had steel roller doors and window shutters. It was constructed of brick and terra cotta and sheathed with galvanized iron. The iron roof trusses were covered by tin. The flooring was composed of 5 inch solid spruce plank with 1" of yellow pine.

In 1900 the need for more office space prompted a 50 foot extension eastward at both the first and second story level. Four years later the building was further enlarged by the addition of a third story to the fireproof end and the 1900 extension. The lookout tower on Pier A was altered in 1918 to receive a clock donated by Daniel G. Reid (one of the founders of U.S. Steel) as a memorial to the servicemen who died during World War I.

The pier continued to function under the control of the Board of Docks and its successors and in 1960 became the headquarters of Marine Fire Company One. During the late 1960's the pier became threatened with demolition to make room for a land reclamation program. On June 27th, 1975 the pier and building were placed on the National Register of Historic Places.